



The Royal Family

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PENGUIN READERS

Chapter 1 The Royal Story

It is the morning of 6 September 1997. In London, the streets all the way from Kensington Palace to Westminster Abbey are full of people. Many of these people have slept there all night. In the crowds, there are visitors from all over Britain, and from abroad too. They are waiting patiently for the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. The carriage passes, carrying her body. People in the crowd cry and throw flowers. The world has lost someone very special.

Princess Diana died in a car crash in Paris. She was only thirty-six. Her new lover, Dodi al Fayed, died with her. Before that terrible day, she was just starting a happier time in her life, after her divorce from Prince Charles.

Diana was one of the most popular women in the world, but her life was hard. When she married Prince Charles in 1981, she seemed to have everything. She came from a rich family, she was beautiful, and her husband was the future king of Britain. But even as a child she was unhappy after her mother left home. Then, as a princess, she was lonely when Prince Charles lost interest in her. Perhaps her two sons, William and Harry, were the only really happy part of her life.

Now, as the carriage brings her body to the church of Westminster Abbey, these two boys, fifteen and twelve years old, walk bravely behind her. Television cameras are recording the funeral, and it is shown around the world. Westminster Abbey is full of famous people, many of them from other royal families or foreign governments. Some of them are Diana's friends, from the film or music business. The crowds outside now say their last goodbye to Princess Diana with more flowers and tears. The young Princes follow their mother's body into the church, and the funeral begins.



The funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales.

In Britain, it is a time for questions about the royal family. Did the royal family push Diana away when she and Charles were in trouble? Why didn't they help her more? Diana was a new kind of princess, and she could help to make a better future for Britain and the royal family. Diana was not afraid to speak about her problems in public. The royal family didn't like this; they have traditionally kept their troubles secret. But the public liked her because she opened her heart to them. She also helped people who were poor and ill.

Who will continue her work now? Will Charles really be king after all this, or will the crown go straight to his oldest son, Prince William? In the last few years, people have begun to worry about these problems. Do the royal family do enough for the country? Are they too rich? For a long time Queen Elizabeth II ruled the country quietly. Most people were happy with the royal family, and many people didn't even think about it much. But now, on the day of the funeral, everyone is talking about it.



The history of the British royal family goes back more than a thousand years. In that time England has always had a king or queen except for the ten years between 1649 and 1659 when Oliver Cromwell's parliament took power after a war against Charles I. But then the royal family returned when Charles II was crowned in 1660.

In 829, Egbert of Wessex became the first king of England, but the first 'England' was a smaller country than today. Britain was not one nation for a long time. Wales had its own rulers until 1282, and there were kings of Scotland until 1707. Today, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all part of the United Kingdom.

Early English kings had to try and protect the country from enemies. King Alfred the Great (871–99) was a strong ruler who

built the first English navy and defended his country against attacks from Vikings and Danes from northern Europe. But his good work was destroyed a hundred years later by Aethelred II, a very weak ruler who let the Danes into the country. For fifty years after that, there were Danish kings in England. Then, in the famous year of 1066, soldiers from Normandy (now part of France) crossed the sea to England. They won a war against the English, and their ruler became King William I of England. For a time, England and France were almost one nation.

There were many interesting kings and queens who helped to make British history. 'Bad King John' was very unpopular, because he tried to take high taxes from the people. In 1215, he had to sign a famous paper, The Magna Carta. This took away some of his powers. King Henry VIII (1509–47) was a powerful king. He is famous because he had six wives. He also started a new Christian church, the Church of England. He could then divorce his wives when he wanted to.

But the time of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) was a 'golden age' for England. Art, science, music and literature were all important. The English nation was strong; its powerful navy won the war at sea with Spain. Queen Elizabeth often made tours of England; everywhere crowds of excited people welcomed her. If you visit an important old house in England today, the owner will still sometimes tell you, 'Queen Elizabeth slept here!'

Earlier kings and queens like these had great power. They could start wars, make laws, and do things in their own way. But later, a lot of this power went to Parliament. Today's king or queen still 'rules' Britain and acts as the head of government. But the British Parliament has the power to make the laws.

These early kings and queens were, of course, not perfect. They often had lovers, ate and drank too much, and were rude to important visitors. Then, during the time of Queen Victoria, people began to believe that the royal family should be a perfect family.

Victoria was queen for a long time, from 1837 to 1901. This was a time of power for Great Britain, when the nation ruled many other countries in the world. Victoria married Prince Albert, a German, and they had nine children. They were very serious about their duties. Victoria loved Albert very much, and she was an excellent wife and mother. She wanted to show that they had a good, Christian family life.

But today in Britain, we don't believe in the perfect royal family. A lot of the old magic has gone. We want the royal family to do their duty and protect our traditions. But we also want them to be more modern and open. Can the royal family do both these things in the future? Will the magic come back? They work hard for the country. But they are people with their own worries and problems. We must accept this too.



On 2 June 1953, nearly forty-four years before Princess Diana's funeral, the streets of London were also full. But people were there for a much happier ceremony. On that day the young Princess Elizabeth was crowned as Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain. Like other kings and queens since 1066, she came to Westminster Abbey for the ceremony. She rode to the Abbey in the royal carriage, with its fine horses, and the heavy gold crown was placed on her head. Elizabeth promised to look after the nation and its people, and so she accepted her duties in the long line of British rulers.

But Elizabeth had some modern ideas too. She wanted the ceremony to be on television. The church and the government didn't welcome the idea. It was an important ceremony – it mustn't become public theatre! But Elizabeth won. At that time, only a few homes in Britain had a television, but many more people bought one in time for the great day! Excited friends and neighbours visited their houses and watched too. This was real



On 2 June 1953, the young Princess Elizabeth was crowned as Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain.

magic! Everyone wanted to see the beautiful young Queen in her long white dress. Later, there were parties in the streets, and presents for the children too – often a special cup or plate, with the Queen's picture on it.

World War Two was at an end; people were glad to be alive and free. They were not rich, but things were getting better. A young, pretty queen was exactly what they wanted. She could help to make a modern Britain.